



**(U) Ask Zelda!: Careless Whispers**

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 05/15/2014

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*(U) The below column is unclassified in its entirety.*

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Dear Zelda,

It has become commonplace these days for my coworkers to drop their voices down to a whisper when having certain discussions in the office. It seems very rude to have a conversation in front of other people and deliberately exclude them that way. It also creates an exclusionary clique culture, where some are in the know and others are not. Plus it is super distracting!

If they are not comfortable with being heard with what they are saying, perhaps it is something they should keep to themselves? I wish they would at least take their discussion elsewhere instead of doing it right up in my face. It is especially demoralizing when everyone in the cubicle bay but me is part of the conversation, which means I am the one person they are trying to keep out. I have considered asking my supervisor for guidance, but I am not sure what if anything can be done.

Sincerely,

- On the Outside

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Dear Outsider,

Boy, I'd like your problem. I can hardly concentrate due to all the loud conversations in my workplace. I wish my co-workers would whisper! Still, I see your point.

If it is an intentional snub, then yes, it's rude. They should take their convo elsewhere or use Microsoft Lync to silently "chat" with each other.

Try not to read too much into the whispering. Maybe they're keeping their voices down so they won't disturb you, especially if they believe you are hard at work. Or they might not think you'd be interested in the conversation. Perhaps it's a personal, private, or embarrassing matter that they only feel comfortable sharing with their closest pals. Or maybe they're planning a surprise party for you!

Are they darting glances your way and then giggling? If not, there's nothing to worry about.

If you can't ignore it, try initiating a short conversation with your cube-mates occasionally to let them know you're open to some unofficial chit-chat. Your attempts to be friendlier may be met with more inclusion on their part.

If that doesn't work, you could always try the direct approach:

Approved for Release by NSA on  
08-26-2014, FOIA Case # 78406

- Stroll into the cubicle bay and ask, "What are we talking about?"
- Turn around and insert yourself into their discussion by saying, "What's so funny?" or "Are you discussing the American Idol elimination last night? Because I totally didn't see that one coming."
- Roll your chair over to them and innocently whisper, "Why are we whispering?"
- And then there's always the blunt, half-kidding approach: "Guys, I'm getting paranoid that you're talking about me, since I'm the only one excluded from this conversation."

Your nosiness will either get you included or they will take their chats elsewhere. But don't blame me if the former results in a far worse work distraction for you. If that happens, read this **previous column**.

*-Edits*